

July 21, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Briefing of the Panama Subcommittee, House Merchant Marine Committee

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[redacted] of OCI/WH, accompanied by George Cary and [redacted] briefed the Panama Subcommittee of the House Merchant Marine Committee, which last week had taken testimony from Ambassador Bunker, who heads the team negotiating a new Panama Canal treaty. Chairman Metcalfe conducted a formal session of the Subcommittee, complete with an opening statement stressing the secrecy of the briefing. [redacted] was invited to give a statement and the "five-minute rule" was applied to questions from each member, most of whom were present in the chairman's office. STAT

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[redacted] focused on Torrijos' virtually total control of the power structure in Panama and his success in gaining general support through populist appeals and an irrevocable pledge to secure untrammelled sovereignty over the Canal Zone. [redacted] was questioned sharply and sometimes heatedly by the members, particularly Congressmen Snyder and Murphy; a less cool analyst might well have been flustered. There was a unanimous feeling that no Congressman could vote for the treaty endorsed by the State Department without losing his seat at the polls, and questioners probed in vain for some evidence that Torrijos could be deflected from his goal. There was concern too that a Panamanian-controlled canal under Torrijos would be subject to closure at his whim or at the behest of communist powers. [redacted] adroitly deflected numerous requests for opinions on the merits of State's position, confining himself to analyzing Torrijos' own motives and likely actions. He kept cool in the face of challenges to his expertise (much was made by Congressman Snyder of the fact that he has not yet visited Panama) and, at the end of the session, he was warmly thanked and praised, even by Snyder. Congressman Murphy questioned some of [redacted] statements on the economic situation, and we offered to send him some follow-up material. STAT
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